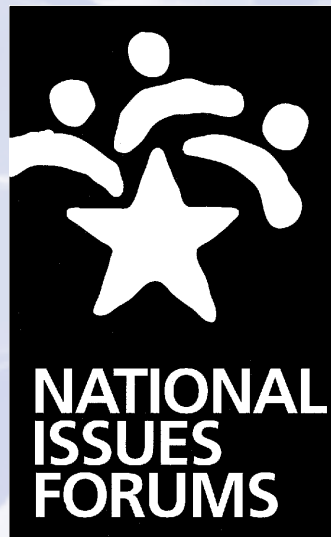


NIF Report on the Issues

Racial and Ethnic Tensions

What Should We Do?



Doble Research Associates



National Issues Forums (NIF)

The National Issues Forums (NIF) is a nonpartisan nationwide network of educational and community organizations that convenes forums for citizens to deliberate about public issues. NIF forums do not advocate a specific solution or point of view. Rather, deliberative forums provide a way for citizens to exchange ideas and experiences with one another, and make more thoughtful and informed decisions. For more information about NIF, contact NIF Research, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, OH 45459-2777. Phone: (800) 433-7834. www.nifi.org

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Doble Research Associates is a public interest consulting firm that specializes in exploring public opinion about complex issues. For more information, contact Doble Research at 375 Sylvan Avenue, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. (201) 568-7200. www.dobleresearch.com



This report analyzes what happened in National Issues Forums on “Racial and Ethnic Tensions: What Should We Do?” that took place in 45 states and the District of Columbia, a sample of the hundreds of NIF forums that took place in 2001 and 2002 and will continue in 2003. To explore people’s thinking about this issue when they have a chance to deliberate about it, Doble Research Associates, a public interest consulting firm, qualitatively analyzed what happened in these forums and assessed questionnaire results from 2,541 participants who responded by November 1, 2002.

National Issues Forums bring together citizens to deliberate and make choices about challenging social and political issues. In the past, NIF has addressed such issues as money and politics, terrorism, the economy, education, health care, and crime. Throughout the nation, civic, service, and religious organizations, as well as libraries, high schools, community colleges and universities have convened thousands of forums in hundreds of communities.

Contents

Executive Summary	1
The Framework for Deliberation	4
Approaching the Issue	
Defining the Problem	
Remedies for Racial and Ethnic Tensions	
A Diverse Nation	
What We Can Do	
Forums with Younger People	18
The Impact of Deliberation	19
Citizen Forums in Cincinnati	20
Questions and Answers about the Forums	22
Additional Information	
<i>Questionnaire Results: show the results of the Pre- and Post-Forum Questionnaires</i>	27
<i>Demographics: Where Participants Are From</i>	29
<i>Methodology: explains the research conducted for this report</i>	35
<i>About National Issues Forums: describes National Issues Forums in detail</i>	36
<i>About Doble Research: provides information about the firm that prepared this report</i>	37



Racial and Ethnic Tensions:

What Should We Do?



1. Approaching the Issue

National Issues Forum (NIF) participants said the issue of racial and ethnic tensions is a matter of urgency both in their communities and in the nation at large. However, many participants also questioned whether the issue would ever be resolved, suggesting that they see racial and ethnic tensions as a “wicked problem” for which there is no solution in the sense of definitive and objective answers.

- a. Stories:** Many participants of color connected to the issue on a personal level, sharing stories about racism and discrimination they themselves regularly encounter. Many of them also said the issue cannot be dealt with until Americans honestly confront the legacy that history has left on racial and ethnic tensions.
- b. Different Realities:** A number of participants of color said that while they routinely experience prejudice and discrimination, whites live in a world of privilege, in which these realities do not exist.
- c. Resentment about Special Treatment:** Many white participants, particularly those who were younger, saw quotas, preferences, and special treatment as a major source of racial and ethnic tensions.

2. Defining the Problem

Participants defined the issue as more than simply black and white, saying racial and ethnic tensions involve a host of other ethnic and racial groups, including Hispanics, Native Americans, various Asian people, and others. As immigration and migration patterns change, participants said, so do tensions between different groups.

3. How Much Change Has There Been?

Most people in the forums, including many participants of color, said the country has made great progress in terms of racial and ethnic tensions. However, a smaller number of participants, many of whom were African and Native American, said prejudice and discrimination are as common as ever and that we are backsliding in terms of civil rights.

4. Inequality

Many participants, especially those of color, defined racial and ethnic tensions in terms of inequalities in economic and educational achievement and opportunity, and access to political influence and other positions of leadership.

5. An Institutional Issue

A number of participants defined the issue in institutional rather than interpersonal terms.



6. Remedies for Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Some said that racial and ethnic tensions would not be eased until the country's political and business leadership looks more like the U.S. population. While participants overwhelmingly agreed that the key to reducing inequality is education, they were divided about whether tax breaks and job training are effective strategies.

7. Equal Opportunity as a Universal Goal

Participants said we should strive to ensure equal opportunity for all Americans, although many felt that we are a long way from that goal.

8. Personal Responsibility

Even though reducing gross inequities in terms of opportunity and achievement was a goal of many, nearly everyone also said the primary responsibility for success or failure falls on the individual.

9. Serious Doubts About Affirmative Action

While calling racial and ethnic tensions a pressing issue and saying there are inequities to remedy, most participants had serious doubts about affirmative action as a means to those ends.

a. Greater Support for Need-based Affirmative Action:

Some were more comfortable with a need-based form of affirmative action than with a racially or ethnically based one.

b. Strong Support for Diversity:

While many opposed quotas, preferences, and special treatment, nearly all participants said diversity is an important goal that should be pursued by both educators and employers.

c. Some Said Affirmative Action Is Still Needed:

A smaller contingent of participants, including many participants of color suggested that whatever problems affirmative action may have, the need for it, as well as its underlying rationale, have not changed.

10. Opposition to Profiling

Most participants strongly opposed racial and ethnic profiling, expressing special concern for Muslims and Arab Americans after September 11. Many participants of color in the forums highlighted the extent of profiling in the United States as they shared their own experiences with profiling.

11. Learning English for Pragmatic, not Ideological Reasons

Participants focused on the importance of learning English not because of ideological but for practical reasons, saying people need English to succeed economically and socially.

12. Bilingual Education, but Only for a Limited Time

While participants in some forums, especially in communities with large numbers of native speakers, favored bilingual

education, many said bilingual education should be available only for a limited, defined period of time.

13. A Diverse Mainstream

Instead of describing America as a “melting pot,” participants favored what one man called “a diverse mainstream.” Rather than trying to melt down our differences, easing racial and ethnic tensions, participants said, can be achieved by celebrating our diversity and the unique contributions different groups have made to society.

a. A Safe Space: Many said taking pride in one’s ethnic and racial identity is essential to building a strong sense of self.

b. Some Concern about Self-Segregation: But while saying it is important to maintain one’s ethnic identity, some worried that if carried too far, it could lead to the isolation of minority groups from society’s mainstream.

14. Learning about Other Cultures

Participants said it is important to share one’s cultural traditions while simultaneously learning about other groups, adding that cultural interchanges could safeguard against the danger of isolationist ethnic enclaves.

15. Focus on What Unites Us

Regardless of race or ethnicity, many said there are a number of ideas we value and share, such as freedom, tolerance, and democracy.

16. Beyond Policy

Participants wanted to move beyond policy approaches and build or strengthen interethnic and interracial relationships themselves.

a. A Safe Space: Participants said that forums are a good way to begin meaningful dialogue about race and ethnicity, because they provide a safe space for people to deliberate together.

b. The Need for More Talk: Many felt that such conversations should continue in our homes, schools, faith organizations, and communities.

c. A Local Approach: Participants in the forums favored local efforts to combat racial and ethnic tensions. Different communities, they said, have different problems and needs that cannot be addressed by national, “one-size-fits-all” policy solutions.





Participants in this year's forums deliberated using the NIF issue book, *Racial and Ethnic Tensions*, prepared in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation.

The issue book provides NIF participants with a framework for dealing with the issue. The issue book outlines the issue in a nonpartisan way and then presents for public deliberation three alternative approaches for addressing it. Rather than conforming to the ideas of any single advocate, each of these three approaches represents a distinct set of American priorities and views that informs and structures the deliberation without persuading or biasing the participants. The approaches are not necessarily exclusionary. Instead, each presents an array of ideas and options, along with the costs and consequences of each, for participants to consider and deliberate about so that they may, and often do, construct their own approach to the issue.

Approach One: Look Beyond Race and Ethnicity

This approach holds that we must focus on what unites us, not what divides us. We will all benefit if people stop seeing everything through the lens of race and ethnicity. There has been much progress in bridging racial and ethnic divides, proponents of this approach say, and there will be even more if we eliminate racial preferences, which are unfair to everyone. We must also insist that recent immigrants assimilate rapidly. In this view, we should provide equal opportunity for everyone, and treat everyone the same — as Americans.

Approach Two: Build Self-Identity First

This approach says we should acknowledge and accept differences, not blur them. The way to reduce ethnic and racial tensions is to first build racial and cultural identity. We will never learn to get along well with others until we first know who we are — as individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Only through ensuring that our particular group is strong and well regarded, can we relate to others. We must allow minority communities and schools to set their own course, even if it means accepting some self-segregation.

Approach Three: Open All Doors to Everyone

This approach calls for all of us to take an active part in finishing the job of integration. It is a job that we have to work at by making continuous efforts to meet, talk with, and understand each other better. Proponents of this view oppose policies that encourage racial or ethnic separation. Only through living, working, and going to school together — and setting common goals through community dialogue — will prejudice subside.

Approaching the Issue

1. An Urgent Issue

"[Racial and ethnic tensions] are a question of economic and social survival. We can't afford not to deal with it." Woman, Boston, Massachusetts

- "People in our forum said race is the number one problem in their communities." Moderator, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



- a. A “Wicked Problem:”** But while calling this an urgent issue, many questioned whether it would ever really be resolved. Implicitly, participants saw the issue as a “wicked problem” to which there may be no solution in the sense of definitive and objective answers.
- “You’re always going to have some [racial and ethnic tension]. Let’s not sit here and think we won’t.” Man, Sumter, South Carolina
 - “America will never be equal. Never be equal.” Woman, St. Louis, Missouri

2. The Historical Context

Many participants, especially minorities, said the issue cannot be seriously discussed unless Americans come to terms with the country’s history.

- “The African American historical narrative has been difficult, at times brutal. We need to be conscious of that history in order to be able to transcend it.” Man, Rapid City, South Dakota
- “Being a Japanese American, my family was very concerned when the media talked about Pearl Harbor after 9/11. My mom, grandparents, aunts, and uncles spent almost three years in American-style concentration camps during WWII. So the thought of equating Pearl Harbor with 9/11 and transferring anger and hostility from Japanese Americans 60 years ago toward Muslims and Arab Americans is terrifying.” Man, Davis, California

- “Native Americans carry a lot of historical grief and anger. As a Navajo, I was raised in a boarding school. The history of our language and of our people is never taught to us.” Woman, Rapid City, South Dakota
- “I believe in reparations [because] there has to be some dealing [with the past] before you move forward.” Man, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- “What troubles me is the denial, no acknowledgment or recognition of real history.” Woman, Selma, Alabama

3. Personal Perspectives

- “Once we got to school, nobody cared about color. You were on the track team together, the school newspaper. But the walls went back up as soon as the [school day ended]. And so did the violence outside the schools.” Woman, Boston, Massachusetts
- “Growing up, I’d go to a friend’s house and if the parent was coming home at 5 p.m., I had to go out the back door. I never understood why I couldn’t go out the front door.” Man, Davis, California
- “I’ve worked in schools for 30 years. I see the lack of [professional level] role models for the minority population. I see the entry level jobs, the groundskeepers, aides, and custodians — there [are] plenty of role models for us there. But I’m the only Latino teacher in [the] two schools I go to.” Man, Davis, California



- “In my town, a black family tried to move in and [some people in town] burned their house down.” Student, Stillwater, Oklahoma

4. Different Realities

- “Many white people in our forum did not see blatant racial discrimination, whereas people of color had stories about overt discrimination that they were able to share. People said that Americans live in different realities.” Moderator, Adrian, Michigan
- “Racism is still pervasive, I feel it every day. But a lot of white Americans just don’t see the problem. They don’t see it because they don’t live it.” Man, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- “We must acknowledge that there is rampant racism [against Native Americans] in Rapid [City].” Man, Rapid City, South Dakota
 - a. **“White Privilege”:** A number of participants talked about the privileges and advantages white people enjoy, often without realizing it.
- “When you walk in where you’re not known, they look at you, like [they’re asking], ‘what do you want here.’ [But when] a white person walks in [it’s], ‘hi, how you doing, come on in.’ [Whites] have so much privilege it makes you sick.” Man, Rapid City, South Dakota
- “Here, the president of our university said, ‘I know I have white privilege.’ His being very up front relaxed everyone and

made it easier for everyone else to be candid.” Moderator, Springfield, Ohio

- “The best way to protect a privilege is to deny you have one.” Man, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- b. **A Mile in My Shoes:** A number of participants of color described how this issue touches their daily lives.
 - “A Native American woman said people of color have three personal experiences [of racial prejudice] a day.” Moderator, Talhequa, Oklahoma
 - “Some people think that if you don’t speak English [without an accent], that means you’re dumb.” Woman, Boston, Massachusetts
 - “You can’t feel my pain. You could never feel what I’ve gone through unless you went to another country and just because you were another race, they made you feel this way.” Woman, Miami, Florida
- c. **Assimilation Can Be Painful:** While maintaining that assimilation may be required to achieve success, several minority participants said that it could be psychologically painful.
 - “Growing up in the Asian community, I almost had to give up my identity in order to succeed. I had to become like the majority. Which is a lie [because] that’s denying your own humanity.” Man, Grand Rapids, Michigan
 - “Coming from the Caribbean, I learned early on to get the ribbons out of my hair and get rid

of my accent. I've learned to be a better copy than the originals." Woman, Boston, Massachusetts

- "Damage gets done to my soul. I'm tired of having to call myself 'Terry' because you can't deal with the fact that I'm Latina." Woman, Grand Rapids, Michigan

5. Resentment about Preferences and Special Treatment

Many white participants, especially younger ones, said quotas, preferences, and special treatment are a source of racial and ethnic tensions.

- "I'm half-Hispanic and when I applied to school, I checked the box that said I'm Hispanic. I liked the money I'm getting because I'm Hispanic a lot more before I thought about this issue than I do now." Woman, Stillwater, Oklahoma
- "At our school, people do not have to prove they're Indian. Their word is enough for them to qualify for preferential treatment and get \$500 to \$2,500 in aid. Which is wrong." Man, Stillwater, Oklahoma
- "People here talked about reverse discrimination and about white males having trouble getting aid or jobs." Moderator, Warrensburg, Missouri
- In a number of forums, whites complained about what a St. Louis man called "people trying to get reimbursed for what happened 150 years ago."

a. Is a Focus on Differences

Divisive? Some participants said we should talk about what unites us, not about our differences.

- "White participants said the more we look at differences, the more they divide us." Moderator, Adrian, Michigan
- "What offends me is, we call ourselves Hispanic Americans or black Americans. My family is from Russia. I don't call myself a Russian American. Can't we just say we're all Americans?" Woman, Miami, Florida



Defining the Problem

6. A Broad Definition

Participants saw this issue as involving many ethnic and racial groups.

- "A high school student in our forum said that instead of the issue being just black and white, [racial and ethnic tensions] includes Asians, Hispanics, people from the Balkans, and many others." Moderator, Covington, Kentucky
- "People here said we should frame the issue more broadly than just black or white." Moderator, Grand Rapids, Michigan

7. How Much Change Has There Been?

Participants said that in many respects, there has been significant change in the U.S. over the past 40 years or so.



a. In Many Ways, Participants

Saw Progress: Most participants, including a great many participants of color, said the country had made real progress in terms of racial and ethnic tensions.

- “It’s getting better. The younger generation is more liberal than the older generation is. It takes time, but things change with the generations.” Woman, Miami, Florida
- “We’ve made real progress in the last 25 years. We used to have totally segregated schools and now we don’t.” Man, St. Louis, Missouri

b. But More Needs to Be Done:

But most also said we must do more.

- In the Post-Forum Questionnaire, a solid majority, including eight in ten African Americans agreed “in many ways, prejudice and discrimination are as common as ever in housing, education, business, and social settings.” (See Tables 3 and 13.)
- “Last month, a nonwhite gentleman was looking for an apartment and when he called up, they said, we don’t have one. But the next caller was white and he got an apartment. [Discrimination] is still out there.” Man, El Paso, Texas
- “Martin [Luther King, Jr.] should be turning in his grave. I haven’t seen real changes happening in this country.” Man, Sumter, South Carolina
- “It’s sad that the issues today are the same as they were 30 years ago.” Man, Grand Rapids, Michigan

- While fewer than three in ten whites agreed that “we are sliding backward” in terms of civil rights, nearly seven of ten African American participants felt this way. (See Table 13.)

8. “Tensions” Defined as Inequality

Many said “racial and ethnic tensions” stem from gaping racial and ethnic inequalities in terms of opportunity, income, education, and political influence.

- “I’m concerned about [the distribution of] resources. I see big gaps between who has food, money, power, economic ability, and education.” Woman, Rapid City, South Dakota
- “Blacks make up 20 percent of the population of Grand Rapids, but we don’t own 2 percent of the wealth.” Man, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- “People here said we need to focus on economic inequality, that minorities don’t move up because of limited economic opportunity.” Moderator, Charlottesville, Virginia

9. An Institutional Issue

A number of participants defined the issues of racial and ethnic tensions in institutional, rather than interpersonal terms.

- “Who controls the resources in this country? That’s what creates the problems.” Woman, Rapid City, South Dakota
- “Sometimes when we talk about racism, we think about

individual acts. [But] institutional racism prevents some groups from being [successful].” Man, Grand Rapids, Michigan

- “Some said that racism is institutionalized and so responses to correct racism must be institutional. Helping one child at a time is inadequate.” Moderator, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

10. Overlapping Issues

A number of participants said racial and ethnic tensions are intertwined with income and economic status.

- “Minority communities tend to be in poor areas. And in a poor area, it’s hard to go to school and tough to get started.” Man, Davis, California
- “Race and class are heavily connected. I’m a descendant of slaves. Given that my family is from Alabama, [there were] opportunities that [my mother] was not allowed to have, which then put me at a disadvantage.” Woman, Boston, Massachusetts
- “Instead of a focus on race, [people in our forum] discussed socioeconomic background as more important.” Moderator, Davis, California

Remedies for Racial and Ethnic Tensions

11. Political Remedies:

Some said that racial and ethnic tensions will not be eased and racial and ethnic inequality will not be reduced until the country’s political and business leadership looks like the U.S. population.

- “[Things won’t change] until we establish leadership that looks more diverse, looks more like the tossed salad [we are]. It’s about leadership, access, and opportunity.” Woman, Boston, Massachusetts
- “[Native Americans] have been subjected to a lot of policy that was supposedly good for us. When you talk about policy my first question is, who makes the decisions?” Woman, Rapid City, South Dakota
- “In our forum, people said the key question is, Are we willing to let diverse people lead this community?” Moderator, Owensboro, Kentucky
 - a. **Enforce the Civil Rights**
Laws: Some focused on existing civil rights laws.
 - “People here said that we must strongly enforce the civil rights laws, that we change people’s behavior, even if we don’t change their hearts.” Moderator, Columbus, Ohio

12. Economic Remedies

People were divided about whether tax breaks and job training were an effective way to reduce racial and ethnic inequality.

- After the forums, participants were about roughly split on both more job training and providing tax breaks to minority enterprises. (See Table 4.)
- However, upwards of eight in ten African American and about two-thirds of the Hispanic participants favored both more job training and more tax breaks to minority enterprises. (See Table 14.)





13. Educational Remedies

While some saw both economic and political remedies as important, participants overwhelmingly said the key to reducing inequality is education.

- “[Education] is the best way to empower people.” Woman, Boston, Massachusetts
- “People here said we should focus on schools, not economics, because without a good education, you can’t get into the labor market.” Moderator, Columbus, Ohio
- “Many [Native American children] are missing out on their education because of the oppression they and their ancestors have gone through. Last year, only 26 kids graduated from high school from a class that [had] almost 300 [Native American children in it] in eighth grade.” Man, Rapid City, South Dakota
- “Investments in education at an early level could make tremendous strides for racial integration if we targeted them right.” Man, Davis, California

14. Equality as a Universal Goal

Forum participants agreed that the ideal was to ensure equality for all Americans.

- After the forums, nine in ten favored setting school and workplace performance standards that apply to everyone. (See Table 4.)
- Everyone favored this idea, including overwhelming majorities of Asian, African, Native, and Hispanic American participants. (See Table 14.)

a. Some Said Equal Opportunity Is Far from a Reality:

A number of participants said that while equality may be our goal, ours is not an “equal opportunity” society.

- “If you think of society in terms of football, we have white players, black players, Asian, and Latino players. But you only give the plays to the white players. Our team won’t be able to compete.” Man, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- “When I ran admissions to a graduate program, I knew that people in African American and Latino communities weren’t getting brochures until someone said, ‘let’s include them in the mailings to hear about this opportunity.’” Woman, Boston, Massachusetts
- “People here said, ‘let’s work to make equal opportunity available to all people.’” Moderator, Bel Air, Texas

b. But a Few Did Not Agree:

A few participants said opportunity is already equal.

- “The emphasis in our forum was on succeeding through one’s own efforts, with people here saying that [equal] opportunity exists.” Moderator, Newcastle, Wyoming

15. Responsibility

While reducing gross inequities in terms of educational and economic achievement and access to positions of leadership was a goal many shared, nearly everyone also said the primary responsibility for success or failure falls on the individual, and that individuals have

the responsibility to take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

- “I left a job paying \$150 a week to work for \$53.50 because I wanted a career. And I worked myself up. A lot of African Americans did, too. Opportunity was there for all of us. You took it. You went to school. Some fellows didn’t want to go to school. That was up to them.” Man, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey
- “Eventually, all of us minorities find success through our own efforts.” Male, El Paso, Texas
- “I have one thing going against me — I’m Spanish. But that doesn’t mean that I am not capable of going out there, doing the same thing as anyone else. Even though they may close the doors on my face, I’m going back. I have that opportunity and I’m privileged to go and do it.” Woman, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey
- “A lot of Americans take opportunities for granted. We [simply] grow up, get an education, [and] go get a job. And then there are people wanting to get into this country who will take advantage of [those] opportunities.” Woman, Sumter, South Carolina

16. Serious Doubts about Affirmative Action

While calling racial and ethnic tension an urgent issue, most participants had serious doubts about, or opposed, affirmative action when defined in terms of preferences, special treatment, or quotas.

- “Something in my head just doesn’t click with the idea that instead of [being judged on the

basis of] my resume, I’ll be judged on whether or not my name sounds Spanish.” Woman, Davis, California

- “Quotas pit one group against another. So if you have blacks, Hispanics, and Asians being put into jobs, and they’re displacing whites who otherwise would get them, those whites are not going to be happy.” Man, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Three of four participants said “special treatment based on race or ethnic background is unfair and causes more friction and resentment,” including solid majorities of every ethnic and racial group.
(See Tables 3 and 13.)

a. Support for Diversity: But while opposed to quotas, preferences, and special treatment, participants said diversity is an important goal that should be pursued by both colleges and employers.

- “The Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders take a certain kind of each woman. I think that’s fine.” Woman, Stillwater, Oklahoma
- “People here said there is a need for diversity and a need for education about ethnic and cultural diversity.” Moderator, Owensboro, Kentucky

b. Support for Need-Based Affirmative Action: Some preferred a need or class-based form of affirmative action.

- “Affirmative action was implemented to bring physical diversity to the universities but what’s really lacking is economic diversity. Whether





you're white, black, Mexican, or whatever, if you don't have money, you're less likely to go to college." Woman, Davis, California

- "The group felt that need-based aid was better than ethnic or racial aid." Moderator, Stillwater, Oklahoma
- "People here wanted to emphasize economic diversity, not racial and ethnic inequality." Moderator, Charlottesville, Virginia

c. Some Said Affirmative Action Is Still Needed: Others, especially participants of color, suggested that whatever problems affirmative action may have, the need for it, and its underlying rationale have not changed.

- "Affirmative action is not only needed to counteract past discrimination but also to combat [discriminatory] patterns of hiring and opportunities that still go on, including subtle benefits like 'old boy networks.'" Woman, Boston, Massachusetts
- "If quotas solve a problem, we need them." Man, Grand Rapids, Michigan

17. Strong Opposition to Profiling

Most participants opposed racial and ethnic profiling.

- "They shouldn't profile [race or ethnicity]. They should profile the action. If you weren't doing anything wrong and you got profiled — that's when you take down the badge number." Man, St. Louis, Missouri

a. Personal Experience with Profiling: Participants of color often talked about their own experiences.

- "Every time I'm coming from a [white] client's house, I make sure I have a folder with my client's name in it, where I'm coming from, the proper ID and everything, because the police [routinely] stop me and want to know what I'm doing out there." Man, Englewood, New Jersey
- "All the minorities in our forum said they had experienced racial profiling." Moderator, Merrillville, Indiana

b. Profiling after September 11: Many expressed special concern about Arab Americans.

- "Attacks against Arab Americans raise a lot of questions, because these people are just as American as anybody else. But people claiming to be good Americans are attacking them." Man, Davis, California
- "Innocent people are being implicated based on [9/11], just because of their ethnicity and the way they dress and speak. And that's a very, very dangerous thing." Man, El Paso, Texas
- "A student from Afghanistan felt compelled to lie and say he was from India [to avoid being harassed]." Student, Stillwater, Oklahoma

18. Learning English for Pragmatic, not Ideological Reasons

Participants focused on the importance of learning English



not because of ideology, but for pragmatic or practical reasons, saying people need English to succeed economically and socially.

- While 70 percent of the forum participants said English should be the country's "official language," it was clear from their comments that most wanted to emphasize English for practical reasons. (See Table 4.)
- "People said that immigrants who can't speak English are at a disadvantage and that, pragmatically speaking, not being able to speak English is a big communication barrier." Moderator, Stillwater, Oklahoma
- "Everyone needs to know enough English for communication and understanding what's going on in the country and how our government works." Woman, Sumter, South Carolina

19. Bilingual Education, but Only for a Limited Time

Bilingual educational programs have come under attack across the nation. States such as Massachusetts and California have opted to end bilingual education programs and replace them with English immersion. While bilingual education teaches children core subjects in their native languages and does not transition students to English-only classes until they become proficient with English, immersion instructs children only in English and promotes them to mainstream classes after one year or less.

Arguing that English is the national language, supporters of immersion say the fastest way for children, especially young children, to learn a language is to be fully immersed in it. They claim that children are currently left in bilingual education far too long before being integrated into the mainstream. But proponents of bilingual education argue that asking children to master core subjects in a foreign language invariably means they will fall behind, often far behind.

- a. Support of Bilingual Ed:** In some forums, especially in communities with large numbers of native speakers, people were in favor of bilingual education.
 - "I don't think you should punish a child. You cannot let them fall behind in their regular education just because they can't speak English. Bilingual education is good, if it's done properly." Man, El Paso, Texas
- b. A Defined Period:** Many participants tended to say that bilingual education should be available to all students, but only for a limited, defined period of time.
 - "Our goal should be to get [students] in and out [of bilingual ed] in a year. If some kids need longer, take two years. But don't drag it out." Man, Boston, Massachusetts
 - "Our group favored a limit of two years on bilingual education." Moderator, Merrillville, Indiana



20. Other Issues Related to Bilingual Education

a. Bilingual Ed Should Be

Flexible: While most said that bilingual ed should end after a brief, defined period, others called for flexibility, saying some children learn more quickly than others.

- “The older you are, the harder it is to learn a new language. If they come to this country older than seven, learning English is hard [and may require more than a year or two in bilingual ed]. But at five, you pick up English like that [*snaps fingers*].” Man, Englewood, New Jersey
- “People in our forum said that while immersion might be effective with small children, it should not be the only option as it might not be effective with adults.” Moderator, Lawrenceburg, Missouri

b. Preserving Identity: Some, particularly those who were raised speaking two languages, felt that maintaining their native language was a means to preserve their own identity.

- “I grew up learning Russian and English, which changed my life. Immigrants brought up in two worlds [should] be able to have the language their parents speak and also the language of the overall community.” Woman, Davis, California
- “Our language is who we are. Our language, the Navajo language, was used in WW II. I’m very proud to speak my own language.” Woman, Rapid City, South Dakota

c. The Value of Bilingualism:

While learning English was essential, many said that in light of changing demographics and an increasingly globalized economy, it is increasingly important to learn a second language.

- “English should be the main language. But a second language, especially Spanish, would be beneficial.” Woman, Miami, Florida
- “During WW II, the Indian tribe who sent Morse code in their native language saved many, many lives. So, I think a multi-linguistic society is a blessing, that bilingualism is a strength.” Man, Sumter, South Carolina

A Diverse Nation

21. “A Diverse Mainstream”

Instead of a “melting pot” in which differences blend together, participants favored a society that one man called “a diverse mainstream.”

- “What we’re trying to achieve here is to get [all kinds of] people into the mainstream of America, a diverse mainstream.” Man, Boston, Massachusetts
- “I don’t think you can call [America] a melting pot anymore. It’s more of a quilt.” Man, St. Louis, Missouri
- “A bowl of stew is the way I describe [our society]. You’ve got all the flavors of the different vegetables, if you don’t overcook it.”
- “Students here said the idea of a melting pot is an oversimplification.” Moderator, Charlottesville, Virginia

22. Celebrating Cultural Identity

Participants said that instead of obliterating or assimilating ethnic and racial identity, easing racial and ethnic tensions should mean celebrating our diversity and the unique contributions that different groups have made to society.

- “True Americanism is multiculturalism and diversity.” Woman, St. Louis, Missouri
- “I don’t think we should give up our ethnicity or nationality, whether it’s black, Hispanic, Chinese, or Italian, just for the sake of trying to get along. It’s a beautiful thing that we have blacks, Italians, Chinese, and Hispanics.” Man, Miami, Florida
- “We’d do ourselves a disservice by having cultures completely assimilate. We’d bring another kind of ignorance. The only way to eliminate stereotypes is by getting to know other cultures even better.” Woman, Miami, Florida

a. The Importance of Identity:

Participants in several forums said that taking pride in one’s ethnic and racial identity is essential to building a strong sense of self.

- “People here agreed that people can’t be strong members of the community until they have a strong sense of self-identity.” Moderator, Columbus, Ohio
- “People said a focus on people’s cultural identity would help [them] develop self-esteem, which in turn would reduce negative consequences like the drop-out rate, discipline problems, etc.” Moderator, Cincinnati, Ohio

- “We should find our self-identity and use it to embrace our American identity. Unite those two, rather than taking one on top of the other.” Man, El Paso, Texas

b. Some Concern about Self-Segregation:

While saying it is important to maintain one’s ethnic identity, some added that if carried too far, it could lead to the isolation of minority groups from society’s mainstream.

- “At our school, the African Americans and Hispanics separate themselves. I think that separation and self-segregation is wrong, because we’ve moved so far and we’ve struggled so much.” High School Student, El Paso, Texas
- “Some ethnic enclaves have a rich culture that others would love to share. But it’s intimidating to go where the language isn’t your own and all the signs are in a language you can’t read.” Woman, Davis, California

c. Identity and Curriculum:

In most forums, people did not talk extensively about community schools or curriculum. When the issue did emerge, most said the goal of education is to make sure young people learn what will prepare them to take their place in society, no matter what type of school they attend.

- “If a totally Hispanic community decided to [teach about] only Hispanic issues, they’d isolate themselves from the American way.” Woman, Sumter, South Carolina





23. A Colorblind Society

Some said that while recognizing difference is important, we should strive to be, in all practical senses, a society that is blind to people's color or ethnicity.

- "The ideal for me has always been that I would be seen not as black, but as another American trying to live the American dream." Man, Boston, Massachusetts
- "I prefer to be called an American. Not a black American. Not a green American. Just American because that's how I started — as an American." Man, Sumter, South Carolina
- "Participants here had no problem with what is sometimes called 'the browning of America.'" Moderator, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 - a. **But Is That Realistic?** Most said that the ideal of making sure that all have equal opportunity, regardless of color, is far from being achieved.
- After the forums, about six in ten said acting "colorblind" is not realistic. (See Table 3.)

What We Can Do

24. Learning about Other Cultures

Participants said it is important to share one's cultural traditions, while simultaneously learning about other groups. Many felt cultural interchange would also safeguard against the danger of isolationist ethnic enclaves.

- "[We need to] learn from other cultures. If you know other cultures and other languages, that will help and enrich you." Woman, Boston, Massachusetts
- "Our [Oklahoma State] freshman said the more diversity you have, the more opportunity there is for an educational, mind-broadening, multicultural experience." Moderator, Stillwater, Oklahoma
- "In learning about the uniqueness of each race or ethnicity, you start to find out similarities between them. The more you learn about each group, the more similarities you find." Woman, Davis, California

25. Special Efforts with Children

Forum participants said that since tolerance and prejudice are learned behaviors, it is especially important to expose children to different cultures.

- "If you start with children who aren't born with their prejudices, [education] is likely to be much more successful." Man, Boston, Massachusetts
- "One person said there is no segregation in a preschool." Moderator, Chevy Chase, Maryland
- "I go to the schools and see the little children playing together. They don't see color, they don't see it. We can learn a lot from our children." Woman, Sumter, South Carolina
 - a. **Children as Teachers:** The rewards of educating students may be twofold, participants said, because children often bring home the lessons of tolerance they learn in school.

- “We have a lot to learn from our children.” Woman, Rapid City, South Dakota

26. Focus on What Unites Us

Regardless of race or ethnicity, many said there are a number of ideas that Americans hold, value, and share.

- “People come to America because they want a job that pays a fair wage, to send their kids to a safe school, to get good health care. These are common values that all Americans have.” Man, El Paso, Texas
- “We need to focus on our similarities, not our differences.” Man, Davis, California
- “There are common human values that people from different cultures accept and embrace.” Man, Rapid City, South Dakota

27. Beyond Policy

Participants wanted to move beyond policy approaches and build or strengthen interethnic and interracial relationships themselves.

- “While it’s necessary to talk about what the government does, there are things we can do as individuals. We shouldn’t only focus on what the government can do for us, but also on what we can do for ourselves.” Man, Rapid City, South Dakota
- “Our group wanted to use churches as a mitigating force, they saw that as the way to start.” Moderator, Merrillville, Indiana
- Suggesting that pressing problems should be dealt with on

the local level, a moderator from Oconee County, Georgia said: “People here wanted to talk about the issue in terms of this community.” Moderators from Institute, West Virginia, and Owensboro, Kentucky reported similar attitudes.

a. A Safe Space: Participants said that forums are a good way to begin meaningful dialogue about race and ethnicity, because they provide a safe space for people to deliberate together without accusations or acrimony.

- “What we’re doing around this table here, just talking here is a big step.” Woman, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- “People here said that sharing our thoughts with diverse groups about how to solve this problem [is a start].” Moderator, Grand Rapids, Michigan

b. The Need for More Talk: Many felt that such conversations should continue in the future.

- “My community has a large Hispanic population, and every year we have a cultural fair so we get food, costumes, and music. I’m going to urge that we have a group like this to have some kind of dialogue to initiate a process of [deeper] understanding.” Woman, Davis, California
- “These conversations need to continue, here and in other communities. This [conversation] is real, very positive. Just us coming together as a forum is very powerful. It’s powerful.” Man, Sumter, South Carolina





1. Less of an Issue

In the forums, those under 30 were less likely than older participants to see racial and ethnic tensions as a divisive issue.

“Students here were in favor of interracial dating and marriage.” Moderator, Topeka, Kansas

“High school students who came to forums at Lock Haven University favored a lot more contact and getting to know each other, along with interracial dating and marriage.” Moderator, Lock Haven, Pennsylvania

“If my daughter’s friends were asked to describe me, and she has friends of every race and background, they would say how tall I am or how old. But they wouldn’t mention my race — it’s just not important to them, they just don’t see it.” Woman, Blacksburg, Virginia

2. Against Affirmative Action

People in the forums under 30 were broadly opposed to affirmative action, particularly in terms of higher education and scholarships. Even some of those who had benefited from affirmative action found the practice problematic.

“Young people here rejected the premise of affirmative action and said that equal opportunity does exist. One man said, ‘People from India can get loans that I can’t get.’” Moderator, Custer, Wyoming

“Students here didn’t want to check boxes for race or ethnicity when they applied to college or

for scholarships. They wanted to eliminate all quotas and preferential treatment.” Moderator, Chevy Chase, Maryland

“I got a partial scholarship to college because I’m one-sixteenth Indian. And though I was happy to get the money, I think that’s wrong.” Student, Stillwater, Oklahoma

Only small minorities of participants 17 and under favored “providing tax breaks, incentives and loans to give minority business an opportunity to develop and prosper,” compared to three in four among those 30 and older.

3. Eager to Learn

Many young forum participants were eager to learn more about other cultures and engage in meaningful conversation about race and ethnicity.

“After forums held at Lock Haven University with both inner-city Philadelphia high school students and rural high school students, students said that while the media projects images that keep us fearful and apart, they were hopeful and eager to dispel stereotypes.” Moderator, Lock Haven, Pennsylvania

“After our forum, young people wanted to have more community dialogue about this issue. But older people were less enthusiastic.” Moderator, Institute, West Virginia

The forums had a noticeable effect on the thinking of a great many participants. After the forums, nearly half of those who deliberated said they saw ways to work on this issue that they had not seen just a few hours earlier, even though the issue of racial and ethnic tensions is one that participants were thoroughly familiar with. (See Table 2.)

Many felt that the issue of racial and ethnic tensions was particularly well suited to the deliberative process. Engaging in civil, open dialogue in a safe space was often seen as a meaningful way to initiate community-level dialogue about the country's most historically divisive issue. As one participant from Grand Rapids, Michigan, said: "I think a big step is what we're doing around this table here, just talking."

Though participants discussed the issue with care and consideration of the views of others, the deliberations were not without contention. In the forums, there was often a sense of two different realities, of people living in two different Americas. Many people of color said racism and discrimination are woven into their daily lives, and they shared stories of routine mistreatment and discrimination. Many white participants, on the other hand, did not see the white privilege, prejudice, and discrimination that minority participants described as common. Another difference was that whites generally agreed that change in racial and ethnic tensions over time had been significant while many people of color said not that much has changed or even that the country is backsliding in terms of civil rights.

While there was often a sense that people live in different realities, many left the forums with a deeper understanding of both the issue and of the experiences of others. It was important, they said, to congregate with a diverse group of people to hear others' views about an issue in a civil dialogue. As one participant from Grand Rapids, Michigan, said: "It isn't until you get down and talk to each other about what happens to you, that you really understand why this is such an important issue to deal with."

Along with increased understanding about their differences, participants said they realized how much we have in common. Indeed, it is these common American values that unite us, they said. Regardless of race or ethnicity, virtually everyone said we all value justice, tolerance, equality, responsibility, and the freedom and opportunity to pursue our dreams.

Many participants left the forums motivated to continue the deliberation in their own homes, schools, faith communities, and other local institutions. Many also said that national policy, by itself, is either inadequate or irrelevant. Continuing the dialogue with diverse groups at the community level, exposing their children to different cultures, attitudes, and beliefs, learning more about each other, and working together to reduce racial and ethnic tensions at the local level were among people's most commonly voiced goals.





In the aftermath of widespread civil unrest following the shooting death of an unarmed teenage black male by a white police officer, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* launched “Neighbor-to-Neighbor, Community Conversations on Race,” an unprecedented, communitywide dialogue. Using as a framework the NIF issue book *Racial and Ethnic Tensions*, more than 100 citizen facilitators, trained by The Ohio State University Civic Life Institute directed by David Patton, moderated 145 “Neighbor-to-Neighbor” forums in 109 communities between October 2001 and April 2002.

The City of Cincinnati

Crossing the Ohio River from Kentucky to Cincinnati meant freedom for escaped slaves in the years before the Civil War because the city was the last stop on the Underground Railroad. A museum celebrating that history will soon be completed on the city’s riverfront. And so, in some respects, the city of Cincinnati has much to be proud of in terms of its historic role in the fight for civil rights in the U.S.

On the other hand, relations between Cincinnati’s white and African American communities have long been strained, particularly between the city’s predominantly white police force and its African American population. The recent unrest was just the latest in a series of disturbances the city has endured because of conflicts between the police and black civilians. Even before the most recent incident, *The Enquirer* had decided to focus on the issue of racial and ethnic tensions in the year 2001. What happened in April of 2001 gave the newspaper’s project an even-greater urgency.

The Forums

The greater-Cincinnati forums were somewhat different than the NIF forums held in 44 states and the District of Columbia in 2001-2002. The Cincinnati forums had more of a focus on both that particular community and on finding concrete solutions to racial and ethnic tensions. Dorothy Battle, a prominent member of the Steering Committee that planned and oversaw the “Neighbor-to-Neighbor” effort, said such modifications were necessary because people in Cincinnati wanted to talk about their community’s here and now. But the same NIF issue books, starter video, questionnaires, and approaches-model that were used in the national forums were also used in greater Cincinnati, thereby enabling a comparison of the results.

Comments from Hosts and Facilitators

In some respects, what hosts/convenors and facilitators/moderators reported in greater Cincinnati was similar to the national results. In a debriefing session organized by *The Enquirer*, more than 200 hosts and facilitators said participants’ personal stories were the most powerful parts of the forum because they were filled with what one called “eye-opening moments” for white participants. “One such moment was when an older man talked about the time when black police officers were not allowed to arrest whites in this city,” one facilitator said. Another was when participants heard about a local teacher who washed her hands whenever she touched a black student.

As in the NIF forums, hosts and facilitators spoke favorably about the process. “It helped us get talking

instead of just arguing about the problem,” one said. Many were encouraged to find so many others willing to talk with strangers about such a divisive issue. Facilitators also talked about meeting neighbors and building connections among those who came. Repeatedly, hosts and facilitators praised *The Enquirer* for doing so much to make the dialogues such a resounding success.

Still, there were some complaints. People said those who most needed to be there were the least likely to attend. And so, as one facilitator said, “much of the forum involved preaching to the converted.” Others said there was not enough diversity in the dialogues, with too many white, middle-class women and not enough young people and African Americans. And some said that while talk is welcome, such talk, in and of itself, is not enough to deal with all the problems facing greater Cincinnati. Action is needed, they said, with several favoring the economic boycott of downtown.

In terms of follow-up, many hosts and facilitators said new partnerships, often forged by churches with predominantly black and white congregations, will work together to continue the dialogue on the issue. “Sunday is the most segregated day of the week,” one host said. Others said forum participants agreed on the importance of increasing contact, calling that the best way to increase understanding and trust. One facilitator wrote:

“My life has changed drastically.... I am currently running for [office] in a district that encompasses a largely African American population. I had no idea I would be doing this at the time of the meeting ... I believe I can

be part of the problem or the solution and, in whatever small way, I choose to be part of the solution.”

Forum Results

Compared to the national forums, greater Cincinnati saw somewhat more emphasis on getting to know people. As in the national effort, many “Neighbor-to-Neighbor” forums focused on reaching the young. Also, many in greater Cincinnati talked about this issue in terms of class, instead of just race and ethnicity. When asked why the area is divided by race and how to bridge the gap, “personal responsibility topped many neighborhood lists,” *The Enquirer* reported, with participants also saying school leaders should insist on diversity in the curriculum and teach respect for racial differences.

Questionnaire Results

The results of the Post-Forum Questionnaires in Cincinnati were generally consistent with the national results, but with a few important exceptions, each pointing in the same direction — Cincinnati participants were more likely to say the country is “sliding backward” in terms of civil rights, and more in favor of:

- Strongly attacking housing and education practices that separate people based on race, (85 percent in Cincinnati compared to 64 percent nationally);
- Providing more job training, etc. to minorities (83 percent in Cincinnati compared to 56 percent nationally); and
- Providing tax breaks, loans and incentives to minority businesses (77 percent in Cincinnati compared to 47 percent nationally). (See Table 19.)



1. Does the public connect to this issue as the conventional wisdom suggests?

No. The conventional wisdom holds that most Americans, including the great majority of white Americans, overwhelmingly oppose both affirmative action and bilingual education, favoring instead a “color-blind” selection system and English immersion.

But people’s thinking about both issues is more complex and multi-faceted. If people are asked if they favor or oppose affirmative action, most will say they are opposed. But if they are given more choices (e.g., Should we eliminate, increase, or maintain affirmative action at current level?), their responses become less clear-cut. Then, if they have time to deliberate and talk about the issue in their own words, there is even more nuance in their answers. In the forums, many who opposed affirmative action based on race or ethnicity said they would favor a class-based or economically based form. In addition, people strongly supported affirmative action when it was framed as developing and implementing outreach and communication strategies to recruit underrepresented ethnic or minority groups who would otherwise remain uninformed of such opportunities. Finally, many who opposed “special treatment” said a student body or workforce should be diverse and representative in terms of race and ethnicity because diversity is both fair and an asset to an organization.

Similarly, with bilingual education, people favor immersion when given only two choices. But as they deliberate and have a chance to express themselves, it is apparent that their real thinking about the issue is complex. Many opted for flexibility in the bilingual education programs adopted by schools and communities, saying children learn at different rates. Younger children, they said, easily pick up a new language and should be quickly immersed, whereas older children and adults may need more time. People were also more willing to support bilingual education if such programs were limited to a defined period of time rather than extended indefinitely. English immersion programs usually take place over one year, before children are placed in mainstream classes, and participants said bilingual education should work the same way. Finally, people drew distinctions based on the ethnic make-up and needs of a community, saying certain areas with higher numbers of immigrants could have a greater need for more extensive bilingual education programs than others.

2. How does the public approach the issue?

Participants see this issue through different lenses or in terms of different realities.

Participants of color often approached this issue from a historical perspective, describing how the past has shaped or led to the present. Unless the past is acknowledged, they said, present-day wrongs could never be understood or remedied. Moreover, minorities often said the world they live in is unlike the one that white people experience. Telling stories of racism and discrimination that routinely affect them, they said that most white Americans are not aware of the “white privileges” they hold.

On the other hand, a large number of white participants tended to take an ahistorical view, saying, in effect, “the sins of the fathers should not be visited upon people today.” Moreover, many whites were not mindful of day-to-day indignities that minorities contend with, or as one moderator said, “did not see blatant discrimination.” White participants were far less likely than minorities to agree that prejudice is as common as ever in housing, education, business, and social settings.

3. Are there other dimensions to the issue that people in the forums see?

Yes. A great many participants said racial and ethnic tensions are closely linked to issues of class, saying people of color are over-represented in the working class and among the poor and not as visible among the middle class and wealthy. Class, they said, has a direct impact on the opportunities people have, and many said that policies designed to help those with lower incomes would be an effective, indirect means to assuage racial and ethnic tensions.

Also, forum participants, particularly those of color, often viewed the problem of racial and ethnic tensions as arising from institutional factors. Rather than seeing racial and ethnic tensions in interpersonal terms, participants of color said discrimination and prejudice are built into the social, economic, and political institutions that dominate this country.

4. What values were at play in the discussions?

Tolerance: Participants said being open to other people's heritage would help address racial and ethnic tension. They identified increased information as a way to avoid viewing minorities as the "other" and wanted to celebrate the ways in which people of different cultures contribute to society.

Respect: Participants said we should respect differences, even celebrate them, and not hope that they "melt away."

Justice: Participants were solidly opposed to the practice of racial and ethnic profiling, saying everyone should be treated equally under the law and that the civil rights laws should be vigorously enforced.

Opportunity: Participants said the way to transcend racial and ethnic tensions is to make sure that all Americans have equal opportunity in terms of employment and a quality education.

Responsibility: Participants said society should do all it can to reenforce the idea that an individual's success or failure should depend not on government policy, but on personal responsibility.

Equality: Many defined "racial and ethnic tensions" in terms of inequality, especially in terms of education and income, and said we must reduce gross inequities.

Community: Instead of looking for national solutions, forum participants focused on the community level, saying the most significant changes come less from national policy than from actions taken, and interethnic ties built, at the local level.

Hope: Most participants were optimistic about the future, saying the nation had made great strides in terms of this issue and that progress would continue. However, participants of color, though hopeful, were less optimistic.

The American Dream: Participants said we share the goal of living in a society in which all have the opportunity to pursue their dreams and realize their full potential, with the understanding that success or failure depends on the individual.

5. What effect did deliberation have?

Participants had a chance to hear other voices and gain new perspective on the views and feelings of each other. In many forums, participants of color talked about their own experiences with profiling and described the subtle ways that whites receive privileges because of the color of their skin. Some white participants, on the other hand, spoke of the resentment they felt because of the "special treatment" extended to minorities, often likening affirmative action policies to reverse discrimination. Such exchanges, in a civil, deliberative dialogue, encouraged people to listen and hear each other without rancor, bitterness, or accusations.

6. What mattered to people as they deliberated?

As they deliberated, participants wanted:

- a. A diverse mainstream.** Participants agreed that it is time to move away from what they saw as an outdated, static concept of “a melting pot,” instead, they favored bringing everyone together into a “diverse mainstream” in which all ethnicities and colors are woven together to create a rich, vital, dynamic tapestry. It is essential, they said, to celebrate the contributions that different cultures make and have made to American life.
- b. English as our official language, but for practical reasons.** To become fully functioning members of society, participants said immigrants must learn English as soon as possible. However, participants also said that being able to speak English is necessary for pragmatic, not ideological reasons, noting that being able to communicate is required to find a good job in this country.
- c. To create equal opportunity.** Participants said that racial and ethnic tensions are rooted in unequal access to political, social, and economic opportunities. To reduce tensions, they said, everyone must have the same chance to attain success.

7. Is a “public voice” recognizable?

Yes.

Education is the key to reducing inequality. The answer to solving inequalities is to focus on education. Participants said that it is vital that all children have a quality educational opportunity, adding that education is the link to reducing inequalities in all other areas, such as getting a good job.

Commitment to progress. While forum participants said that a great deal of change had taken place to ease racial and ethnic tensions over the past 40 years, they also agreed that there was still work to be done. Participants said they were committed to carrying out efforts to provide equal opportunity for all and encouraging diversity in our schools, communities, and workplaces.

8. Was any firm common ground for action revealed?

Yes.

As participants deliberated, they said it is time to take responsibility for easing racial and ethnic tensions at the community level.

Participants advocated continuing local dialogue about racial and ethnic tensions. Only by working through difficult, but honest, conversations about race, they said, could we begin to understand different perceptions of racism and discrimination.

Finally, participants thought that the best place to begin is with our children. Participants believed that children were the least likely to be affected by prejudiced attitudes and could be “taught” tolerance, equity, and justice. As hope to move beyond racial and ethnic tensions rests with our children, forum participants said that our time, energy, and resources should go to them as well.

9. At what stage is the public on this issue? Has the public's thinking evolved?

As evidenced by more than 3,500 participants who deliberated in a forum in 45 states and the District of Columbia, the public sees this as an urgent issue that they connect with on both a policy and personal level.

While most said there had been great progress since the civil rights era, they also said the country has a long way to go. Some, including many participants of color, wondered whether racial and ethnic tensions would ever completely disappear, citing incidents of prejudice and discrimination they themselves experience or that occur in their communities.

Others, however, pointed out a generational change. Compared to older participants, those under 30 did not see the issue as so urgent and were quite comfortable with social interactions such as interracial dating and marriage.

In terms of evolving thought, most said that instead of a melting pot, the U.S. is a mosaic or tapestry in which ethnic and racial differences fit into the ideal of an inclusive America that respects, incorporates, and celebrates the cultural contributions of all ethnic and racial groups.

10. What needs to happen next in the national dialogue?

Beyond national action, participants said it is important to take responsibility for lessening racial and ethnic tensions at the community level.

- a. A local focus:** People saw the issue of racial and ethnic tensions as not only a national problem, but also a local issue shaped by the location, history, and ethnic makeup of each community.
- b. Create safe spaces:** Participants wanted to continue deliberating about the issue, conversations they felt were difficult but necessary. They looked to create more safe spaces where diverse groups of people could come together and continue the process.
- c. Interaction and talk:** Participants called for more interaction and conversation among people of different racial and ethnic groups, saying dialogue breaks down the barriers to understanding, which is essential to reducing tensions.

Questionnaire Results: A Comparison of Participants' Pre-Forum and Post-Forum Views

Table 1

Agree with Statement

Which statement best describes what you think should be done about racial and ethnic tensions?	Pre-Forum %	Post-Forum %	Difference %
I have a definite opinion about what should be done.	12	19	+7
I have a general sense about what should be done.	59	64	+5
I am not at all sure what should be done.	27	15	-12
No Answer	2	3	+1

Table 2

Post-Forum

Do you see ways to work on this issue that you didn't see before?	Yes %	No %
	49	40

Table 3

Agree with Statement

Do you agree or disagree with the statements below?	Pre-Forum %	Post-Forum %	Difference %
Too many people still see everything through the lens of racial and ethnic discrimination.	75	75	—
Special treatment based on race or ethnic background is unfair and causes more friction and resentment.	73	75	+2
In many ways, prejudice and discrimination are as common as ever in housing, education, business, & social settings.	62	61	-1
Acting "colorblind" isn't realistic and doesn't get us anywhere.	49	57	+8
Cards are stacked against most when it comes to understanding, preserving, & promoting their ethnic culture.	41	45	+4
As a nation, we are sliding backward on the hard-fought progress made during the civil rights movement.	29	33	+4

Table 4

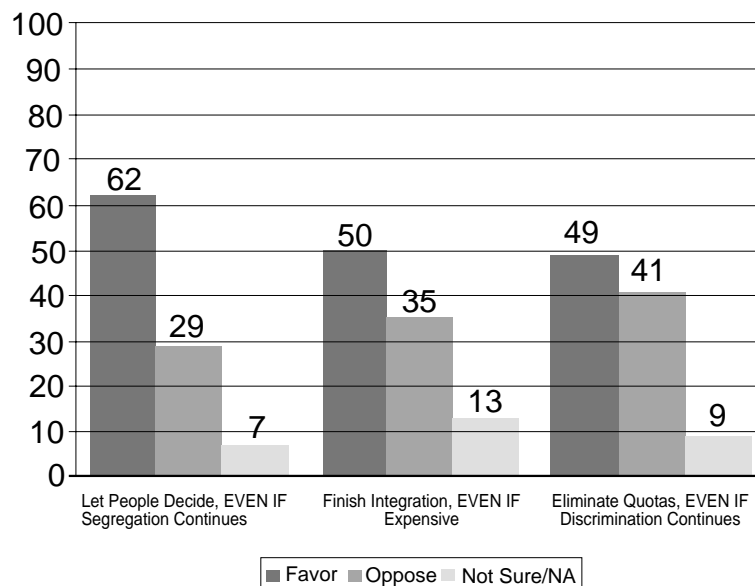
Favor Action

Do you favor or oppose each of these actions?	Pre-Forum %	Post-Forum %	Difference %
Set standards for performance and promotions in school and on the job that apply to everyone.	88	90	+2
Insist that English is the one, official language of the U.S. in business & classroom.	66	71	+5
Strongly attack remaining practices in housing and education that separate people based on race/ethnicity.	64	63	-1
Allow communities to decide school curricula and textbooks that reflect their values, history, and culture.	58	52	-6
Provide more job training, better housing and health care to minorities through government or private partnerships.	56	53	-3
Provide tax breaks, incentives, & loans to give minority businesses an opportunity to develop & prosper.	47	43	-4

Table 5

Post-Forum

Do you favor or oppose each of these actions?	Favor %	Oppose %	Not Sure/NA %
Let people decide when they want to be together and when they don't, EVEN IF it means there would be more segregation where people live and work.	62	29	7
Finish job of full integration, EVEN IF that means spending more tax money on programs, laws, & enforcement.	50	35	13
Eliminate quotas and special treatment based on race or ethnic origin, EVEN IF it means discrimination would continue on the job.	49	41	9



Demographics

Table 6

Are you male or female?	%
Female	60
Male	38
No Answer	2

Table 7

How much schooling have you completed?	%
Some high school or less	42
High school graduate	12
Some college	20
College grad or more	25
No Answer	2

Table 8

Are you?	%
African American	7
Asian American	2
Hispanic/Latino	3
Native American	3
White	80
Other	3
No Answer	2

Table 9

How old are you?	%
17 or younger	42
18-29	29
30-49	12
50-64	10
65 or older	6
No Answer	2

Table 10

Have you attended an NIF forum before?	%
Yes	13
No	85
No Answer	2

Table 11

If you have previously attended an NIF forum, how many forums have you attended? (asked of the 13 percent answering yes in Table 10)	%
1-3	55
4-6	16
7 or more	25
Not Sure/No Answer	5

Table 12

In which part of the United States do you live?	%
Northeast	10
South	13
Midwest	59
Southwest	4
West	8
Other/No Answer	6

Tables may not equal 100, due to rounding.

Post-Forum Results: Racial and Ethnic Comparisons

Table 13

Agree with Statement

Do you agree or disagree with the statements below?	African American %	Asian American %	Hispanic/Latino %	Native American %	White %
Special treatment based on race or ethnic background is unfair and causes more friction and resentment.	63	73	71	70	77
Too many people still see everything through the lens of racial and ethnic discrimination.	83	75	72	81	74
In many ways, prejudice and discrimination are as common as ever in housing, education, business, & social settings.	83	52	69	76	58
Acting “colorblind” isn’t realistic and doesn’t get us anywhere.	68	64	54	64	55
Cards are stacked when it comes to understanding, preserving, & promoting their ethnic culture.	66	50	51	41	44
Nation is sliding backward on hard-fought progress made during the civil rights movement.	69	27	33	38	29

Table 14

Favor Action

Do you favor or oppose each of these actions?	African American %	Asian American %	Hispanic/Latino %	Native American %	White %
Set standards for performance and promotions in school and on the job that apply to everyone.	94	96	85	91	90
Insist that English is the one, official language of the U.S. in business & classroom.	64	77	46	60	73
Strongly attack remaining practices in housing and education that separate people based on race/ethnicity.	82	73	59	60	61
Allow communities to decide school curricula and textbooks that reflect their values, history, and culture.	59	30	54	60	52
Provide more job training, better housing and health care to minorities through government or private partnerships.	88	64	65	60	49
Provide tax breaks, incentives, & loans to give minority businesses an opportunity to develop & prosper.	80	46	63	51	38

(Racial and Ethnic Comparisons continued from previous page)

Table 15

Favor Action

Do you favor or oppose each of these actions?	African American %	Asian American %	Hispanic/Latino %	Native American %	White %
Let people decide when they want to be together and when they don't, EVEN IF it means there would be more segregation where people live and work.	46	61	53	67	64
Eliminate quotas/special treatment based on race or ethnicity, EVEN IF discrimination would continue on job.	24	46	33	43	52
Finish job of full integration, EVEN IF that means spending more tax money on programs, laws, & enforcement.	76	57	51	49	47

Post-Forum Results: National vs. Cincinnati

Table 16

Agree with Statement

Which statement best describes what you think should be done about racial and ethnic tensions?	National %	Cincinnati %	Difference %
I have a general sense about what should be done.	64	62	-2
I have a definite opinion about what should be done.	19	21	+2
I am not at all sure what should be done.	15	13	-2
No Answer	4	4	—

Table 17

Agree with Statement

Do you see ways to work on this issue that you didn't see before?	National %	Cincinnati %	Difference %
	49	56	+7

Table 18

Agree with Statement

Do you agree or disagree with the statements below?	National %	Cincinnati %	Difference %
Too many people still see everything through the lens of racial and ethnic discrimination.	75	80	+5
Special treatment based on race or ethnic background is unfair and causes more friction and resentment.	73	61	-12
In many ways, prejudice and discrimination are as common as ever in housing, education, business, & social settings.	62	66	+4
Acting "colorblind" isn't realistic and doesn't get us anywhere.	49	60	+11
Cards are stacked against most when it comes to understanding, preserving, & promoting their ethnic culture.	41	43	+2
As a nation, we are sliding backward on the hard-fought progress made during the civil rights movement.	29	47	+18

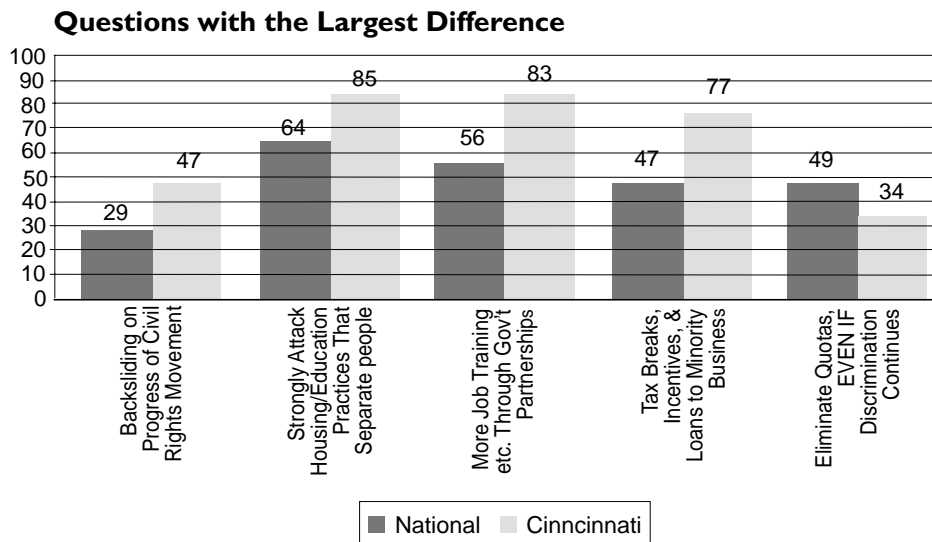
National = 2,541; Cincinnati = 1,497

Table 19

	Favor Action		
Do you favor or oppose each of these actions?	National %	Cincinnati %	Difference %
Set standards for performance and promotions in school and on the job that apply to everyone.	88	83	-5
Insist that English is the one, official language of the U.S. in business & classroom.	66	70	+4
Strongly attack remaining practices in housing and education that separate people based on race/ ethnicity.	64	85	+21
Allow communities to decide school curricula and textbooks that reflect their values, history, and culture.	58	49	-9
Provide more job training, better housing and health care to minorities through government or private partnerships.	56	83	+27
Provide tax breaks, incentives, & loans to give minority businesses an opportunity to develop & prosper.	47	77	+30

Table 20

	Favor Action		
Do you favor or oppose each of these actions?	National %	Cincinnati %	Difference %
Let people decide when they want to be together and when they don't, EVEN IF it means there would be more segregation where people live and work.	62	53	-9
Finish job of full integration, EVEN IF that means spending more tax money on programs, laws, & enforcement.	50	63	+13
Eliminate quotas and special treatment based on race or ethnic origin, EVEN IF it means discrimination would continue on the job.	49	34	-15



Demographics: National vs. Cincinnati

Table 21

Are you male or female?	National %	Cincinnati %
Female	60	58
Male	38	41
No Answer	2	2

Table 22

How much schooling have you completed?	National %	Cincinnati %
Some high school or less	42	4
High school graduate	12	8
Some college	20	20
College grad or more	25	62
No Answer	2	2

Table 23

Are you?	National %	Cincinnati %
African American	7	18
Asian American	2	4
Hispanic/Latino	3	1
Native American	3	1
White	80	74
Other	3	2

Table 24

How old are you?	National %	Cincinnati %
17 or younger	42	3
18-29	29	6
30-49	12	32
50-64	10	36
65 or older	6	21
No Answer	2	1

Table 25

Have you attended an NIF forum before?	National %	Cincinnati %
Yes	13	10
No	85	88
No Answer	2	2

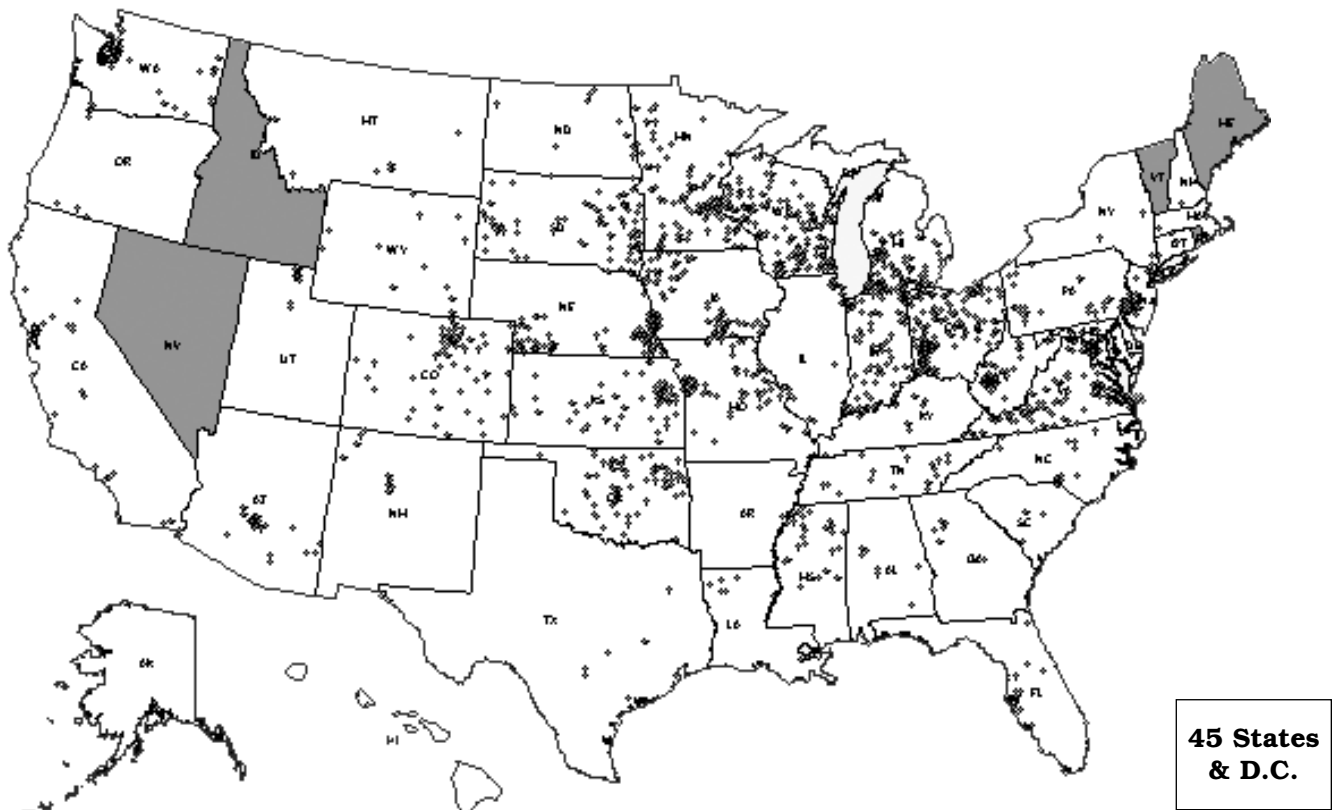
Table 11

If you have previously attended an NIF forum, how many forums have you attended? (asked of the 13 percent answering yes in Table 25)	National %	Cincinnati %
1-3	55	72
4-6	16	11
7 or more	25	5
Not Sure/No Answer	7	13

NIF Racial & Ethnic Tensions Forums: Where Participants Are From

People who participated in the NIF forums analyzed for this report are a sample of thousands of people who continue to deliberate about this issue in communities across the country. Forum participants represented in this report come from the following states and communities:

Shaded States = No Forums



Alabama	District of Columbia	Kentucky	Montana	Ohio	Texas
Alaska	Florida	Louisiana	Nebraska	Oklahoma	Utah
Arizona	Georgia	Maryland	New Hampshire	Oregon	Virginia
Arkansas	Hawaii	Massachusetts	New Jersey	Pennsylvania	Washington
California	Illinois	Michigan	New Mexico	South Carolina	West Virginia
Colorado	Indiana	Minnesota	New York	South Dakota	Wisconsin
Connecticut	Iowa	Mississippi	North Carolina	Tennessee	Wyoming
Delaware	Kansas	Missouri	North Dakota		

Methodology

In preparing this analysis of people's thinking about "Racial and Ethnic Tensions: What Should We Do?" Doble Research drew on a sample of forums in 45 states and the District of Columbia from the hundreds of forums that took place across the country. Five research methods were used:

"A Public Voice" Forums

We transcribed and analyzed four National Issues Forums videotaped for the National Issues Forums videotaped for the annual PBS special, "A Public Voice," hosted by Frank Sesno. Those forums took place in Rapid City, South Dakota; Sumter, South Carolina; Boston, Massachusetts; and Davis, California.

Moderator and Convenor Interviews

We conducted 20 telephone interviews with forum moderators and convenors, some of who had moderated more than one forum. We asked them to describe people's main concerns, their starting points on the issue, the costs and consequences they took into consideration, and the shared understanding or common ground for action that emerged. A partial list of where the forums were held is listed below.

1. Bel Air High School, El Paso, TX
2. Cathedral Hill Hotel, San Francisco, CA
3. Clark State Community College, Springfield, OH
4. Conference Center, Chevy Chase, MD
5. Davis International House, Davis, CA
6. Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Rapid City, SD
7. Federation of Teachers Office, Walnut Hills, OH
8. Friends of the Lovett Memorial Library, Mt. Airy, PA
9. Gerald R. Ford Museum, Grand Rapids, MI
10. Lake County Public Library, Merrillville, IN
11. Lenawee School District, Adrian, MI
12. Lock Haven University, Lock Haven, PA
13. Michigan State University Extension, Adrian, MI
14. Oconee County Civic Center, Oconee County, GA
15. Ohio University Student Union, Athens, OH
16. Eight locations sponsored by Community Conversations, Inc., Owensboro, KY
17. Ramada Inn, Columbus, OH
18. Cathedral Hill Hotel, San Francisco, CA, the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (ncfb.org); Ohio University's Student Union, Athens OH; United National Indian Tribal Youth Conference (unityinc.org) in Grand Rapids, MI

19. Siena Heights University, Adrian, MI
20. Thomas More College, Covington, KY
21. Topeka Association of Neighborhoods, Topeka, KS
22. Virginia Technical Institute, Blacksburg, VA
23. Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce, Warrensburg, MO
24. West Virginia State College, Institute, WV
25. Wyoming State Boot Camp, New Castle, WY

Special thanks to the convenors and moderators who shared their forum reflections with us: Dorothy Battle, Sue Besaw, Dorothy Bishop, Francine Campone, Michelle Charles, Kathy Christie, Bennie L. Davis, Jeanmarie Heriba, Margaret Holt, Chris Kloth, Jim Knauer, Charles Lacy, Patricia O'Reilly, Dionardo Pizaña, Yvonne Sims, Annette Stone, Georgia Stuart-Simmons, Anne Wolford, Forest Wortham, Ruth Yellow Hawk

Forum Observations

We observed five National Issues Forums, listening to initial concerns and learning how deliberation influenced people's thinking. In addition, we interviewed two participants and the moderator after each forum. These forums were held at:

1. *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Cincinnati, OH (moderator and convenor debriefings)
2. GRTV (Channel 25) live broadcast, Grand Rapids, MI (videotape)
3. KCOS (Channel 13) live broadcast, El Paso, TX (videotape)
4. Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK
5. University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

Questionnaire Results

Before and after a forum, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire that frames the issue and identifies key tradeoffs for each approach. We analyzed a total of 3,510 Pre- and Post-Forum Questionnaires, received by November 14, 2002. The data in this report come from 2,541 matched questionnaires.

Research Forums

We conducted three, three-hourlong research forums or focus groups, each with a demographically representative cross-section of about a dozen people. The sessions paralleled NIF forums in that participants viewed the starter video, filled out the Pre- and Post-Forum Questionnaires, and deliberated together about the four choices. The research forums were held in:

1. St. Louis, MO 02/20/02
2. Cleveland, OH 04/11/02
3. Englewood Cliffs, NJ 10/30/02

Please Note:

The quotes in this report were edited for purposes of grammar and clarity.

About National Issues Forums



How to start a forum

Forums are initiated at the local level by civic and educational organizations. For information about starting a forum and using our materials, write the NIF Institute, P.O. Box 75306, Washington, D.C. 20013-5306, or phone 800-433-7834. On the Internet: www.nifi.org.

National Issues Forums bring together citizens around the nation to discuss challenging social and political issues of the day. They have addressed issues such as the economy, education, health care, foreign affairs, poverty, and crime.

Thousands of civic, service, and religious organizations, as well as libraries, high schools, and colleges, have sponsored forums. The sponsoring organizations select topics from among each year's most pressing public concerns, then design and coordinate their own forum programs, which are held through the fall, winter, and spring.

A different kind of talk

No two forums are alike. They range from small study circles to large gatherings modeled after town meetings, but all are different from everyday conversations and adversarial debates.

Since forums seek to increase understanding of complicated issues, participants need not start out with detailed knowledge of an issue. Forum organizers distribute issue books such as this one, featuring a nonpartisan overview of an issue and a choice of several public responses. By presenting each issue in a nonpartisan way, forums encourage participants to take a fresh look at the issues and at their own convictions.

In the forums, participants share their opinions, their concerns, and their knowledge. With the help of moderators and the issue books, participants weigh several possible ways for society to address a problem. They analyze each choice, the arguments for and against it, and the tradeoffs and other implications of the choice. Moderators encourage participants, as they gravitate to one option or another, to examine their basic values as individuals and as community members.

The search for common ground

Forums enrich participants' thinking on public issues. Participants confront each issue head-on, make an informed decision about how to address it, and come to terms with the likely consequences of their choices. In this deliberative process, participants often accept choices that are not entirely consistent

with their individual wishes and that impose costs they had not initially considered. This happens because the forum process helps people see issues from different points of view; participants use discussion to discover, not persuade or advocate. The best deliberative forums can help participants move toward shared, stable, well-informed public choices. Participants may hold sharply different opinions and beliefs, but in the forums they discuss their attitudes, concerns, and convictions about each issue and, as a group, seek to resolve their conflicting priorities and principles. In this way, participants move from making individual choices to making choices as members of a community — the kinds of choices from which public action may result.

Building community through public deliberation

In a democracy, citizens must come together to find answers they can all live with — while acknowledging that individuals have differing opinions. Forums help people find the areas where their interests and goals overlap. This allows a public voice to emerge that can give direction to public policy.

The forums are nonpartisan and do not advocate a particular solution to any public issue, nor should they be confused with referenda or public opinion polls. Rather, the forums enable diverse groups of Americans to determine together what direction they want policy to take, what kinds of action and legislation they favor and what, for their common good, they oppose.

Moving to action

Forums can lead to several kinds of public action. Generally, a public voice emerges in the results of the forums, and that helps set the government's compass, since forum results are shared with elected officials each year. Also, as a result of attending forums, individuals and groups may decide individually or with others to help remedy a public problem through citizen actions outside of government.

About Doble Research Associates

Public Opinion: A Map, Not a Snapshot™.

When it comes to complex issues, the formation of public opinion is dynamic and evolutionary, a work in progress as opposed to a finished product. Doble Research is a nonpartisan, public interest consulting firm that maps out people's thinking by identifying the public's "starting point" — what people think about an issue at the present time, before learning more about it, then lays out how people's thinking evolves as they consider other points of view and have time to deliberate. We give clients a blueprint of how and why people feel as they do — *A Map, Not a Snapshot™.*

Foundations

The Center for Crime, Communities and Culture
 The Chiesman Foundation
 The Community Life Foundation of Owensboro
 The Public Life Foundation of Owensboro (PLFO)
 The Englewood Community Foundation
 The Fetzer Institute
 The Walter and Elise Haas Fund
 The Hager Educational Foundation
 The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
 The Kellogg Foundation
 The Kettering Foundation
 The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
 The Peninsula Community Foundation
 The Pew Charitable Trust
 The Seva Foundation

Government Agencies

The Board of Pardons and Parole, State of Georgia
 The Department of Corrections, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
 The Department of Corrections, State of Indiana
 The Department of Corrections, State of Vermont
 The Environmental Protection Agency
 The Governor's Family Council, State of Delaware
 The National Institute of Corrections, (NIC)
 The National Institute of Justice, (NIJ)
 The National Parks Service, Nebraska
 Vermont Commission on Public Healthcare Values and Priorities

Public Service Organizations

The American Judicature Society
 Audubon Area Community Services, Owensboro, Kentucky
 The Buckeye Association for School Administrators
 The Center for Community Corrections
 The Center for Effective Public Policy
 The Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM)
 The Cleveland Summit on Education
 The Council of Governors' Policy Advisors
 The Council of State Governments, Eastern Regional Office

The Educational and Social Science Consortium
 The General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC)
 The Harwood Institute
 The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC)
 The National Conference of State Legislatures
 The National Academy of Social Insurance
 The National Environmental Policy Institute (NEPI)
 The National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI)
 The Oklahoma State-Centered Project
 The Pennsylvania Prison Society
 The Points of Light Foundation
 Public Agenda
 The South Carolina State-Centered Project
 The Southern Growth Policies Board
 The Southern Regional Council
 The Study Circle Resources Center (SCRC)
 The Upper Room
 Weavings, A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life
 The West Virginia Center for Civic Life
 The Western Governors' Association

States

The State of Indiana
 The State of New Hampshire
 The State of North Carolina
 The State of Oregon
 The State of South Carolina
 The State of Vermont

Colleges and Universities

The College of DuPage
 The Institute on Criminal Justice, University of Minnesota
 The Mershon Center at The Ohio State University
 The University of California at Davis
 The University of Delaware

Corporations

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